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CIA—The Human Side

So far, in discussing the Central Intelligence Agency, *The New Republic* has described how this mammoth, semi-secret agency of government, rivalling the Department of State in manpower and exceeding it in resources, has gathered to itself a variety of tasks that give it in practice an independent voice in policy making. These tasks include the assembling and analysis of overt information from abroad, planning and staging para-military operations, subsidizing foreign political and propagandistic movements and ferreting out information that cannot be obtained in the open market. We can be sure that all the results have not been bad; but we can be equally sure that neither we, nor the Congress, nor even the President knows what all the results are. How many CIA fingers are in how many pies has been and remains a mystery. If accountability is to be restored to the conduct of foreign affairs and the President is to have the reliable intelligence advice he needs, major surgery on CIA is mandatory.

But the defects are not attributable solely to CIA's bigness, its unaccountability, its visibility or the diversity of its duties. There are human weaknesses, some of them endemic to any clandestine organization. To begin with, a secret operation, if it is to be secret, is relatively free of normal checks and balances; it enjoys a protected status. But because it is protected, it is always in danger of being staffed by too many beans out of the same pod. Being less subject to informed, outside criticism as to the steps by which they reach a point of view, intelligence agencies must depend upon their own colleagues to act the part of the devil's advocate – to bring unpleasant facts to the fore.

Whether or not there is a typical CIA agent, observation suggests that there is a typical CIA analyst, and that the mechanism of recruitment, selection and retention in the CIA comes to favor the "safe man." This is a judgment that must be made with some reserve, for however diligently an outsider digs in to CIA, he can never reach bottom. He must rely on samples. For example, Lewis A. Dexter, who has been employed on intelligence projects and has known CIA, the OSS and British Intelligence, reports that at a late stage in their recruitment, CIA employees "were introduced to prospective fellow workers who could blackball them as unacceptable." He believes that it should have been if anything, the other way around: "People should be chosen to work on the same area and problem who are just as different as possible, provided they are willing to communicate with each other." Can this be done?

No one, of course, can be employed in Intelligence who has not been checked and double-checked. And well-intentioned as the security system is, it is stacked against the man who may have been involved in Popular Front movements from 1935 to 1941. Yet these are the very people whose sympathies and knowledge could be most valuable. An ex-Communist who has "transcended" his youthful views but has not become an apocalyptic proponent of inevitable war might make a better analyst of what is happening abroad than an ex-Communist who has become violently and aggressively anti-Communist. Were one to look for the most accurate interpretation of Cuban attitudes, they might be found among, say, Puerto Ricans who 25 years or more ago engaged in left-wing riots at the University – if, as is likely, some of them have matured but not to the point of denying their earlier enthusiasm for social justice. To see clearly what is happening in this revolutionary period and to understand what one sees, a high degree of sensitivity is required to the subtle gradations of left-wing politics and an almost instinctive appreciation that the cloak of anti-Communism covers a multitude of evils. Whether most CIA employees have that sensitivity and that appreciation is open to question.

In part, this is the result of the abnormal isolation of intelligence agents – and not all of them are "spies" – from the world around them. When they are abroad, they are cut off more than others from the very foreigners whom they are supposedly influencing and from whom they are supposedly learning. Any concealed community develops its own patterns of selection, of value and of prestige – all the more so if the community does not require its members to quit it at intervals, to be freshened from time to time by the sounds and smells of other worlds. Its members develop a particular way of looking at events, exaggerating that and minimizing this, not because these exaggerations and minimizations reflect the real situation but because the community tends to become an echo chamber of its own wishes. Prudence and skepticism, the appropriate attitudes for an intelligence service, give way to a boastful arrogance, and an arrogation to oneself of a monopoly on wisdom. Thus, one CIA official can speak blandly of the possibility that "we might have to throw a couple of 'nukes' [nuclear bombs] into Laos"; another can refer airily to having the Bandung Conference "sewed up."

"Nothing was simple in that world of espionage and counter-espionage, treachery and counter-treachery, vengeance and vendetta," Rebecca West wrote some years ago in *The Meaning of Treason*, "and complication is to the soul what condiments are to the palate and alcohol is to the nervous system. . . . Sweet it is to be not what the next man thinks one, but far more powerful; to know what he wrote in the letter he was so careful to seal before he sent it for quite a different person's reading; to charm the confidences from the unsuspecting stranger; to put up one's finger through the whimsical darkness and touch the fabric of state,

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